

11-22-1996

An Ethological Approach to Information Warfare

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Recommended Citation

Editor (1996) "An Ethological Approach to Information Warfare," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol1/iss4/2>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Editorial: An Ethological Approach to Information Warfare

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Volume: 1

Issue: 4

Date: 1996-11-22

Keywords: Ethology, Information warfare

Information warfare (IW) is the collection, protection, presentation, and modification of information to achieve political objectives. IW techniques may directly affect information, its means of conveyance, or human perceptions of it. The ultimate consequence of IW is human behavioral influence, because it is through this influence that political objectives are achieved.

Recent IW writings seem to stress real and potential advances from ever-evolving computer technology. Lost in the descriptions of virtual realities, hyperlinks, holograms, and viruses is the simple aphorism--plus ça change, plus la meme chose. There has been no conceptual modification to the art and science of IW. The classic writings such as the Chan-Kuo 'Tse, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Sun Tzu's The Art of War, Liu Hsiang's The Book of Lord Shang, the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun, and, perhaps, Machiavelli's The Prince remain not only germane but vital and essential. One who persistently studies these works will not be lost in the modern IW era but will point the way.

The one shared feature of the classic works--even as they differ in country, culture, and epoch--is their dependence on an ethological approach. Following basic principles of epistemology, this approach is not based on rationalism--a reasoned, analytic contemplation--but on empiricism--the careful and systematic observation of behavior. In fact, the ethological approach embraces a special type of empiricism, for behavior is observed in its natural habitat. Inferences are made from observation,--seemingly ineluctably-- about instincts and other constructs and principles of interest.

In modern psychology, Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen and Karl von Frisch are exemplars of the ethological approach. Although they chose to study primarily birds, fish, and insects, they have inferred constructs which resonate for students of human behavior. For example, fixed and modal action patterns denote behavioral patterns across all or most members of a group--perhaps analogous to national character. Sign stimulus denotes a triggering mechanism for behaviors--perhaps analogous to elements of neurolinguistic programming. Vacuum behavior denotes a behavior occurring even without its usual environmental releaser, often because of one's lack of opportunity to respond--perhaps analogous to being impelled by some homeostatic imbalance or even an archetype. And behavioral ecology denotes the study of different kinds of species within one habitat--perhaps analogous to sociometric analysis or intergroup dynamics. The three theorists behind these constructs shared the 1973 Nobel Prize for their contributions to knowledge.

Several IW applications follow. With a political objective of blocking an event from occurring, an ethologically oriented IW specialist may note that with inclement weather people are less likely to be outdoors, be active, or to gather in large groups (cf. sign stimulus.) This observation might inspire an attempt to convince people that, at a certain time, there may be inclement weather. Or the IW specialist may note that different people are less likely to congregate if their similar object of interest is expected to be absent (cf. intergroup dynamics.). An attempt to influence expectations might follow.

A more complex objective may involve guerrillas or terrorists. Although it has been attributed to Mao Tse Tung that the revolutionary is a fish swimming in the sea of the people, political and military forces--

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just to be on the safe side--may expropriate the sea and the people through force and other IW techniques. Hutus murderers may live among displaced innocents in eastern Zaire (at least until recently) and Iraqis governmental authorities may place military assets in schools and hospitals. The problem is one of qualitative analysis: how to separate elements that might merit special attention without negatively affecting other elements-- i.e., how to get at the alleged guilty without harming the presumed innocent.

Observing the recent crisis in Zaire, the IW specialist notes that a "third force"-- viz., Tutsis indigenous to Zaire with several other local groups and not so covert aid from the Rwandan government-- has caused the allegedly guilty-- viz., Hutus implicated in the murder of Tutsis-- to flee, thus allowing the presumed innocent-- viz. Hutus not involved in the murders-- to return to their Rwandan homes. An attempt to reinforce perceptions of some third force, even an attempt as rudimentary as the one perpetrated in 1954 by U.S. experts and resulting in a change of government in Guatemala, may follow. Closer ethological analysis might even identify real-world phenomena, leading to the identification of guilty Hutus attempting to blend in with innocent Hutus during the recent mass exodus back to Rwanda.

For situations wherein an IW target does indeed swim in the sea of the people, observing the inevitable misunderstandings between that target and the people can inspire other IW concepts, leading to the sea evaporating and leaving the target flopping on a dry ocean floor. Lastly, these misunderstandings may help form the core of one IW variant: the deception operation, which may be effective even if the people are not deceived--through (1) exacerbating psychological processes of general discomfort, sensitivity to venality and vice and (2) impelling people to use the fig leaf of what the deception operation was intending to depict to separate from the desired target.

In conclusion, IW is a psychological art and science. Do not be misled by scientific and technological change that merely presents novel tools to engage in the same ancient endeavor. (See Lorenz, K. (1981.) *The foundations of ethology*. NY: Springer-Verlag; McKinley, J. C. (November 16, 1996.) *Zairian rebels rout foes, freeing refugees in camps; aid mission now uncertain*. The New York Times pp. 1;6.; Scott, W.B. (March 13, 1995.) *Information warfare demands new approach*. Aviation Week and Space Technology, 85-88. Tinbergen, N. (1948.) *Social releasers and the experimental method required for their study*. *Wilson Bulletin*, 60, 6-52.) (Keywords: Ethology, Information warfare.)